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Shirley's Tragedies

Barbara Ravelhofer

Shirley is perhaps best noted for his comedic elegance, yet it was a tragedy, *The Cardinal*, which the author himself deemed 'the best of my flock'.¹ In the course of his long career, Shirley wrote five tragedies — *The Maid's Revenge* (1626), *Love's Cruelty* (1631), *The Traitor* (1631), *The Politician* (c. 1639), and *The Cardinal* (1641) — and revised substantially a further one by George Chapman, *Chabot, Admiral of France* (licensed 1635). This essay traces Shirley's evolving, multifaceted skill in the tragic mode. I will consider performance dynamics and the spoken voice, drawing on surviving prompt-books and recorded recitals of tragic scenes by Shirley and some of his contemporaries.² I will conclude with an in-depth analysis of passages by Shirley and Chapman. A relatively small group of plays of the same genre is particularly well suited to carve out Shirley's style, which emerges very clearly when compared to Chapman. Altogether, these considerations will allow us to understand the vision of tragedy entertained by a quintessentially Caroline writer.

Compared to their mighty Jacobean predecessors, Caroline tragedians occupy at best a niche in play anthologies for the discerning undergraduate, as Jeremy Lopez points out in the present collection. Shirley hardly registers in current studies of early modern tragedy; indeed his temperament has been found ill-suited to the genre since his 'sense of

¹ James Shirley, *The Cardinal* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1652[53]), sig. A3; dedication to George Buc, a relation of the former Master of the Revels.

² See videoclips of these recitals, Shirley Project website, at <http://community.dur.ac.uk/james.shirley/>.

manipulative distance from convention edges unavoidably toward amusement'.³ There is admittedly a whiff of guilty pleasure in some of Shirley's oeuvre, which begins even as Shirley educates the next generation of playgoers. *The Triumph of Beauty* (pb. 1646), an entertainment for young gentlemen, couches attic tragedy within a merry frame gleaned from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shirley has his charges act as shepherds in a play about Jason and Medea, and when 'Hobbinoll', cast as Medea's little brother Absirtus, complains that he is too tall for the role, he is gleefully informed that he will be cut to pieces anyway.⁴ Tragedy cut back to size indeed.

But Shirley's *vis comica* is alien to the tragic experience only if one categorically demands that, in tragedy, the hero must struggle onwards beneath the fated sky, a plaything of inhuman forces that govern his path. This vision is majestically illustrated by the Shakespearean line 'as flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods, / They kill us for their sport',⁵ yet tragic alternatives were available to Jacobean and Caroline playwrights. 'Close distance' is no oxymoron at all; it captures perfectly how Shirley and many of his contemporaries understood tragedy and its conventions. Arguably, every English revenge play after *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587) thrives on revisiting Thomas Kyd, the visit edging towards dark amusement. Shirley duly pays Kyd tribute in several of his plays, including city comedies. In *Changes*, London's robust denizens bark iconic lines from Kyd's play at

³ Linda Woodbridge's comprehensive *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) passes over Shirley. On Shirley's drive towards amusement, see Gordon Braden's excellent 'James Shirley (1596–1666)', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, gen. ed. F. Bowers, vol. LVIII, *Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists* (Detroit: Gale, 1987), pp. 249–66 (p. 256).

⁴ James Shirley, *The Triumph of Beautie* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1646), p. 6.

⁵ Gloucester, in William Shakespeare, *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, ed. by René Weis (London: Longman, 1993), 1623 Folio, 4.1.37–38.

each other with gusto: a volley from Hieronimo's famous 'Oh eyes no eyes but mountains fraught with tears' is met with 'I will dye Hymens Saffron robe in blood / Put out the Torches with the teares of Virgins, / And Make the Temple quake', improvised on Kyd's character Revenge.⁶

Ever since the early nineteenth century, editors and critics have valued Shirley as a wittily allusive technician who recycled Elizabethan and Jacobean masterpieces; a 'literary magpie' (in the words of his editor E. M. Yearling⁷) rather than a phoenix resplendent in solitary brilliance. An influential strand of genre theory has lionised radical tragedy; yet Shirley's biography will disappoint critics looking for the brawling Marlovian overreacher.⁸ There is no paradigm-shattering maverick who delights in tumultuous times. In 1649 the nation beheaded its King. Mournful odes abounded and *Eikon Basilike*, the publication of Charles's supposed private reflections, became a gloomy bestseller. What was Shirley's tragic gesture? He published a Latin grammar. Maxims such as 'Verbs have their mood and tense, and signifie/ Either *to do*, *to suffer*, or *to be*'⁹ demonstrate that he was no Samson bringing the edifice down. He nursed affection for the theatrical milieu in which he had prospered, and carefully measured his critique of the circumstances that had brought it to its end. Thus he wrote grimly in 1642,

⁶ Shirley, *Changes, or, Love in a Maze* (London: G[eorge] P[urcell] for William Cooke, 1632), pp. 54–55. 'But after them doth *Himen* hie as fast, / Clothed in sable, and a Saffron robe, / And blowes them out, and quencheth them with blood[.]' [Thomas Kyd], *The Spanish Tragedie* (London: Edward Allde for Edward White, [1592]), sig. I2v.

⁷ *The Cardinal*, ed. by E. M. Yearling (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 5.

⁸ Typically, Shirley goes unmentioned in Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 2nd edn 1989).

⁹ Shirley, *Via ad Latinam Linguam Complinata* (London: R. W. for John Stephenson, 1649), p. 16.

A King to break his sacred word, will teach
The great men to be safe without your service
[...] once the crowd takes sent [*sic*]
Of this, you leave your self no oath to swear by.¹⁰

These lines appear in a play pointedly dedicated to William Earl of Strafford, the son of Thomas Wentworth, Shirley's patron during the poet's time in Ireland. Strafford was sent to the scaffold in 1641, abandoned by Charles I.

When talking about 'character', much modern criticism places a premium on interiority: conflicted selves must be opened out to the audience in searching soliloquies, the prototype for this type of tragic hero being, of course, Shakespeare's Hamlet. But Renaissance drama generously allowed for different kinds of character, including character that was, in Aristotelian fashion, subservient to plot, and instrumental to driving the action forward. Shirley's tragedy sometimes used character as a function of the plot (not vice versa), and managed this so well that some theatre lovers of his time put him on a par with Shakespeare, indeed above the bard. Abraham Wright, a Caroline clergyman and inveterate reader of plays, considered *The Traitor* 'a good play' while he found *Hamlet* 'but an indifferent play, y^e lines but meane'.¹¹ The Restoration tragicomedy *The Women's Conquest* (1671) named Shirley's *Cardinal* and *The Traitor* next to Jonson's

¹⁰ Prince Carlo, in Shirley, *The Court Secret* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1653), p. 20.

¹¹ Abraham Wright, 'Excerpta', BL Add. MS 22,608, fol. 74, 85^v. See also Arthur C. Kirsch, 'A Caroline Commentary on the Drama', *Modern Philology*, 66.3 (1969), 256–61.

Catiline, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *Rollo, Duke of Normandy*

(commonly attributed to *Fletcher*) as 'the highest of our English Tragedies'.¹²

Shirley's tragedies treated the nature of revenge, the cost on the person enacting it — and the benefits to the person exploiting it — with deft, unexpected twists. *The Maid's Revenge* is a Portuguese *Taming of the Shrew* gone vindictively tragic: before the eminently desirable Berinthia can marry, a match must be found for the older and somewhat cantankerous Catalina, who expertly curses 'diablo' as she tries her best to ruin her sibling's romantic prospects. Poisons, love-philters, and stale banter on maidenheads produce sub-Fletcherian fare as the sisters turn on each other like hell-cats. Berinthia stabs her brother Sebastiano as he relaxes on the couch ('Nature doth wrestle with me, but revenge / Doth arme my love against it'). Catalina enters '*poysoned*', pulling her waiting woman '*by the haire*'.¹³ Perhaps justly, Swinburne described the fiendish cast as 'beyond the gentle capacity of Shirley'.¹⁴ Even so, the vigorously entertaining play inspired a Restoration remake which brought a poisoned parrot to the mix.¹⁵ It certainly has merit as Shirley's first finger-exercise with female tragic leads.

Shirley's next tragedy, *Love's Cruelty*, improved on the female lead: its spurned adulteress garners the audience's sympathy with an astonishing number of lines revealing the troubled state of her mind. The play starts on an intimate note, offering the audience a glimpse at a seemingly happy couple: Clariana playfully holds back Bellamente as he is about to take leave for the court, where Bellamente's best friend, Hippolito, has newly

¹² E[dward] H[oward], *The Womens Conquest* (London: J. M. for H. Herringman, 1671), preface, sig. [A3]^v.

¹³ James Shirley, *The Maides Revenge* (London: T. C. for William Cooke, 1639[40]), sig. I3.

¹⁴ A. C. Swinburne, 'James Shirley', *The Fortnightly Review*, 47 (1890), 461–78 (p. 466).

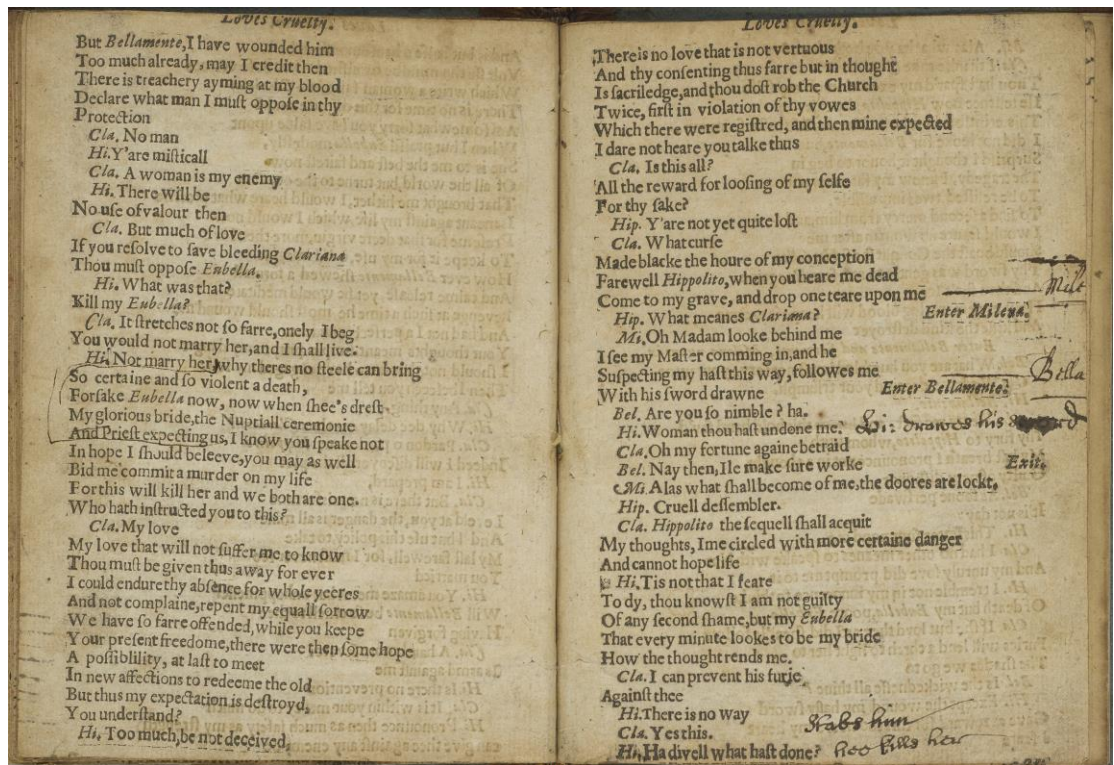
¹⁵ Robert Gould's *The Rival Sisters* (Drury Lane 1696), published by Gould's widow after his death in 1708.

arrived. Clariana decides to meet the man whom her fiancé holds dear above anyone else, and promptly falls for him at once. We first see Hippolito engaged in a fencing class, a scene which aptly conveys his combative, mildly malcontent disposition. A caddish update of Webster's Flamineo, he seeks his own advantage, trying to talk the virtuous Eubella into becoming the Duke's mistress.

Shirley milks the tried-and-tested dramatic conflicts between sexual attraction, male friendship, and conjugal loyalty. Naturally Clariana and Hippolito cannot resist temptation. When Bellamente discovers them *in flagrante delicto* in his own bed, he has, by the standards of his time, the cause and opportunity to do't — and yet, contrary to expectation, proposes a practical arrangement rather than killing for honour. Parallels to *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (a favourite of the Jacobean stage) may come to mind; but Bellamente, unlike Heywood's wronged husband, seems to be more coldly preoccupied with his own reputation: killing his rival would only advertise that he has been cuckolded and ruin his standing at court; much better, then, to hush the affair and go for a discreet separation. The calculated moves and the acknowledgment of frailty prevailing over best intentions point towards the *ennui* of Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode*. We could be in a pragmatic Restoration marriage play, were it not for the shocking denouement offered by Shirley's heroine.

Unlike Heywood's adulterous wife, Clariana does not punish herself but directs her deeply wounded feelings against others, stabbing Hippolito rather than let him marry Eubella. Women drive the play's plot.

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[Caption:]

Fig. 2. Stabbing scene as marked up in a Caroline prompt-book of *Love's Cruelty* (pb. 1640). National Library of Scotland.

A prompt-book for Shirley's *Love's Cruelty* survives at the National Library of Scotland (see Fig. 2).¹⁶ The particulars about the performance for which it served are no longer known; it probably belonged to a Caroline touring company.¹⁷ Oaths and profanations have been excised, but the most substantial cuts concern critical remarks about rulers. Large swathes of passages have been deleted in which Eubella's father implores the

¹⁶ Shirley, *Loves Crueltie* (London: Tho[mas] Cotes for Andrew Crooke, 1640), National Library of Scotland, shelfmark Bute.559.

¹⁷ G. Blakemore Evans, 'New Evidence on the Provenance of the Padua Prompt-Books of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Winter's Tale*', *Studies in Bibliography*, 20 (1967), 239–42.

libidinous Duke to spare his daughter, only to be curtly dismissed ('take the frantick hence').¹⁸ Whoever redacted the prompt-book of *Love's Cruelty* also diminished Eubella's role: in performance, the reduced Eubella comes across as much less assertive, deprived of lines such as

Were we created men and women to
Have a command and empire ore the creatures
And shall we loose our priviledge our charter
And wilfully degrad our selves of reason
And piety, to live like beasts, nay be such? (sig. D^v–D2)

While passages asserting female agency in a courtly ambience might strike a modern reader as harmless, the prompt-book indicates what a Caroline theatre company considered risqué. Its example cautions against the received notion of Shirley as an establishment writer plain and simple.¹⁹ More than once Shirley portrayed rulers in the grip of sexual passion: they follow what their instincts dictate and what their strength will permit. Arbitrary erotic violence serves, in early modern drama, often as foreplay for tyranny to be exercised more widely. Like many other playwrights, Shirley penned variations on the 'lustful tyrant', expressing his discomfort with absolutist rule while yet not condoning tyrannicide; in this he exhibits a stance which certain critics deem not

¹⁸ Bute.559 cuts Sebastian's lines from 'If yet thou hast not lost thy innocence' to 'and let the great ones scape'; sig. [E4]^v to F.

¹⁹ As promoted in Ira Clark, *Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley, Brome* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

sufficiently subversive.²⁰ It was not lustful tyrants as such who excited Shirley's interest; he treated them as a vehicle to examine their victims, expanding his range in female characterisation for drama that was, after all, written for Queen Henrietta's Men.

The Traitor, licensed in the same year, is a case in point. Here Shirley turned his attention to the Medici rulers of Florence. The Medici attracted many playwrights, including Webster, Middleton, Massinger, and Ford; Caroline audiences could relish the piquant detail that Henrietta Maria herself descended from the family, being the daughter of Maria de' Medici.²¹ The assassination of Duke Alessandro de' Medici in 1537 was a popular topic in historical writing of the period and inspired later generations of poets, most famously perhaps Alfred de Musset.²² The subject matter was irresistibly juicy, mingling sex with revolt, a degenerate dynasty, and an evil favourite: the machiavellian Lorenzo de' Medici (better known as 'Lorenzino' or 'Lorenzaccio', 'little Lawrence') plotted the assassination of his dissolute kinsman, Duke Alessandro. Historians disagree on whether Lorenzo intended to restore Florence as a republic (which the city had been until the Medici had usurped its control), or whether he meant to claim the ducal title for himself. Shirley opts for the latter, making Lorenzo abuse his co-conspirators' republican ideals for his own ends. Shirley could have turned the play into an extended debate of political ideas, along the lines of a *Julius Caesar* or a *Coriolanus*, but chose not to. *The Politician*, a later tragedy by Shirley, includes riot scenes; in *The Traitor*, however, the

²⁰ For instance, he dissatisfies Paola Catenaccio, 'From Bed to Worse: Eroticized Politics on the Caroline Stage', *Textus*, 17 (2004), 291–308.

²¹ Lisa Hopkins, 'Staging the Medici: The Medici Family in English Renaissance Drama, c. 1590–c. 1640', *Sun Yat-Sen Journal of Humanities*, 28 (2010), 63–74.

²² For a discussion of sources available to early modern dramatists, see N. W. Bawcutt, 'The Assassination of Alessandro de' Medici in Early Seventeenth-Century English Drama', *Review of English Studies*, 56 (225), 412–23.

citizens of Florence are passingly talked about but do not emerge once in the play, whose action takes its fatal course in the corridors and especially bedrooms of the grand *palazzini* of Florence's leading families. Shirley is more interested in a creative dialogue with dramatic convention.

Critics have speculated that Middleton worked the story of lecherous Alessandro into *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a play Shirley probably knew. *The Revenger's Tragedy* culminates in a banquet with a masque, the whole court carousing to the aptly named Duke Lussurioso. As convention dictated ever since *The Spanish Tragedy*, such festive moments must end in bloody mayhem. Middleton does not disappoint his audience, bringing in close sequence not one but *two* groups of disguised revellers intent on killing the Duke to the table; the second crew is greatly disappointed to find that their work has already been done.

The foremost writer of early Stuart masques, Ben Jonson, had once expressed the wish that such shows might 'make the Spectators understanders'.²³ This aspiration is sorely disappointed in Shirley's tragedies, which are punctuated with masques that conspicuously fail to have any didactic effect on their audience. In *The Traitor*, courtiers plan an entertainment to reform their Duke, whose sybaritic appetites have become a liability. He is confronted with his lewd self as a masque on the vice of lechery is played out before him. The courtiers fret: have we been too direct? They need not fear. On stage, a rake is whipped by furies, but the Duke has only eyes for a lady sitting next to him in the audience. 'My eyes so feasted here', he says, gazing at his pretty neighbour, 'I did not mark it'.²⁴ Such lines prompt respect for Hamlet's unloved uncle Claudius, who

²³ Ben Jonson, *Loves Triumph Through Callipolis* (London: J[ohn] N[orton] for Thomas Walkley, 1631), motto, p. 1.

²⁴ James Shirley, *The Traitor*, ed. by J. Stewart Carter (London: Arnold, 1965), 3.2.46.

can at least still be stirred by a play.²⁵ Shirley's jaded rulers prove impervious to the workings of dramatic art.

The Traitor may represent a case of one-upmanship, the Caroline playwright commenting on Jacobean speed-banqueting. Shirley takes up Middleton's inexorably fast timing and doubling: not one but *two* attempts are staged in rapid succession to assassinate Alessandro; indeed, *The Traitor* makes such demands on the conspirators that one of them begs to be excused from his task due to exhaustion. Depazzi confesses to Lorenzo,

I fall away, you see. I cannot sleep for dreaming of an ax. I have caused my hangings of Holofernes to be taken down in my dining room because I dare not look upon a head that is cut off in it, something of my complexion.
(4.1.231–34)

Through Depazzi, Shirley delivers us a prosaic response to the overkill of twisted plotting and sensational effect in Jacobean revenge tragedy. Middleton's tragedy will drag out painted skulls and corpses dressed in full regalia. There is Vindice, making the dying Duke kiss the poisoned, shrivelled head of Gloriana, his former victim. In contrast, Shirley does not give us the charnelhouse but conversation. Lorenzo, an interestingly loquacious villain, probes his role by tentatively stabbing the portrait of his target, the Duke, and talking about his murderous ambitions. Even more pertinent is Shirley's quite different treatment of the female character that is/was the object of ducal desire: Vindice ventriloquises Gloriana, but Shirley's heroine Amidea speaks for herself. She confronts

²⁵ It is still a moot point why Claudius reacts to the spoken lines of *The Murder of Gonzago* but not the dumb-show preceding it. For a discussion see John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 1951), ch. 5.

her would-be seducer and remains a voice of reason throughout the play. Fiercely loyal to her brothers and fearless in her beauty, she has impressed many critics, especially in early twentieth-century Germany, where she came to be regarded as ‘a true Germanic virgin’.²⁶

If Shirley’s play is about the Medici, it is also about another family. The Sciarra Colonna were a well-established Roman dynasty who produced cardinals and generals fighting on behalf of the popes.²⁷ It is perhaps for these military credentials that Shirley introduced the name in *The Traitor* (Richard Sheil’s remake of Shirley’s tragedy, *Evadne, or, The Statue* (1819), duly has a Colonna take Sciarra’s role). Pushed by Lorenzo, the sanguine nobleman Sciarra has set up his reluctant sister Amidea as a honeytrap to lure the Duke to a deadly appointment. The scheme is flawed from the start. The first attempt fails as the Duke spares Amidea, impressed by her courageous virtue, and Sciarra cannot bring himself to kill a sovereign who has just vowed to mend his ways (a resolution the Duke will later break). More fundamentally, the very expedient to assassinate the Duke compromises the honour of Sciarra’s family. Thus Sciarra is torn between two irreconcilable impulses: should he kill his sister Amidea if she agrees to prostitute herself? Or should he kill her if she refuses to do his bidding? And how does Shirley chart this complex relationship between brother and sister in the decisive scene in Act V?

²⁶ Kurt Eckert calls her ‘Typus einer echt germanischen Jungfrau’. *Die dramatische Behandlung der Ermordung des Herzogs Alessandro de’ Medici durch seinen Vetter Lorenzino in der englischen Literatur (Tourneur, Shirley, Sheil)* (Königsberg: Hartung, 1907), p. 34.

²⁷ Carlo Pietrangeli, *Palazzo Sciarra* (Rome: Cassa di Risparmio di Roma, 1986). The family was mentioned in Guicciardini and other Italian histories of the day, from which Shirley could have taken the name. I use the correct spelling of the name rather than ‘Sciarrha’ (1635 Quarto), adopted by editors and critics of the play.

Sciarra. I will not interpose another syllable

To entreat your pity. Say your prayers, and then

Th'art ripe to be translated from the earth

To make a cherubim.

Amidea. What means my brother?

Sciarra. To kill you.

Amidea. Do not fright me, good Sciarra.

Sciarra. And I allow three minutes for your devotion.

Amidea. Will you murder me?

Sciarra. D'ee tremble?

Amidea. Not at the terror of your sword,

But at the horror will affright thy soul

For this black deed [...]

Sciarra. You shall be the martyr.

Amidea. Yet stay. Is there no remedy but death,

And from your hand? Then keep your word, and let me

Use one short prayer. *Kneels.*

Sciarra. [*aside*] I shall relent.

Amidea. [*aside*] Forgive me, heaven, and witness I have still

My virgin thoughts. 'Tis not to save my life,

But his eternal one. — *Rises.*

Sciarra, give me leave to veil my face.

I dare not look upon you and pronounce.

I am too much a sister. Live. Hereafter

I know you will condemn my frailty for it.

I will obey the duke.

Sciarra. Dar'st thou consent? *Wounds her.*

Amidea. Oh let me see the wound.

She unveils.

'Tis well, if any other hand had done it.

Some angel tell my brother now I did

But seem consenting.

Sciarra.

Ha! But seem?

Amidea. You may believe my last breath.

Sciarra.

Why didst say so?

Amidea. To gain some time [...].²⁸

It is a dialogue of bitter irony, a cerebral echo of Shakespearean tragedy. Half pitched between Othello and Laertes, Sciarra gives his sister exactly three minutes to say her prayers. Amidea, in intelligence a notch above Desdemona, plays for time: veiling her face, she pretends to give in to Sciarra's demands and offer herself up to the Duke, but she has misjudged her brother. In jealous rage and mindful of family honour, Sciarra does exactly what she has sought to prevent. To the very end, Amidea is less concerned for herself than her family's welfare. When her other brother, Florio, breaks through the door, she protects Sciarra and claims suicide. Her touching, delicately humorous last words, 'Kiss me when I am dead. You else will stay my journey', are focused on her brothers. What makes the scene so painful is the sense that we are listening in to siblings who are deeply attached to each other. Shirley highlights the close relationship with many shared lines, which give the impression not of stichomythic antagonism (as might well be expected for this kind of scene) but of characters who effortlessly take the cue from each other and yet make fatally wrong moves. If Shirley achieved, with *The Traitor*, an accomplished tragedy of cabinet intrigue, he also delivered a poignant portrait of a family's destruction.

²⁸ *The Traitor*, ed. by Carter, 5.1.109–39.

In later years, Shirley took to a slightly slower mode that paid homage to Shakespeare and Webster. Two tragedies, *The Politician* and *The Cardinal*, nod at *Hamlet*, to very different effect. A critical tradition holds that Gertrude committed adultery before King Hamlet's murder;²⁹ to see how this might play out in dramatic practice one needs look no further than Shirley. Set in Norway, *The Politician* imagines Gertrude's mésalliance with Claudius more fully as courtiers mutter about the King's hasty marriage to Queen Marpisa; meanwhile, the new Queen dallies with counsellor Gotharus, the play's eponymous politician and would-be usurper of the throne. Shirley gives us two princes from first marriages (these complications are further elucidated by Jitka Štollová). The first, Turgesius, the King's son and a martial Fortinbras type, will ultimately survive the play's exigent plot. The other, Marpisa's son Haraldus, a softer nature, is not so fortunate. To the chagrin of his mother, on whom he seems overly fixated, Haraldus entirely lacks the drive to become the new dauphin in place of valiant Turgesius. He spends much of the play agonising that he might be the bastard offspring of Gotharus, which plunges him into a dangerous sickness. The Queen reassures her son that he is legitimate. Alas, the relieved prince knows not when to stop asking questions:

[Ha.] Why did my Lord Gotharus

Call me the issue of his blood?

Qu. Alas, he thinks thou art —

Ha. What are those words? I am undone

Agen.³⁰

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1982), longer notes on 1.5.42 'adulterate', pp. 455–56.

³⁰ James Shirley, *The Politician* (London: William Wilson for Humphrey Moseley, 1655), p. 51.

As young minds could have learned about the dangers of inquisitiveness in Shirley's grammar, '*Odi pueros praecoci sapientia* — I mislike children of too early wisdom.'³¹ Shirley produced an eminently quotable, efficient tragedy, rich in chilling asides: 'we must / Study at Court, how to corrupt our Children', ruminates Gotharus.³²

Heroic gestures are often undercut, and the register of courtly panegyric receives repeatedly short shrift at Shirley's hands. Here the besotted King addresses his Queen:

Thus every minute I will marry thee,
And wear thee in my heart, vanish the thought
Of all thy sex beside, and what can else
Attempt our separation: th'art obscure,
And liv'st in Court but like a maskquing star,
Shut from us by the unkindnesse of a cloud
When *Cynthia* goes to Revels: I will have
A chariot for my Queen richer then er'e
Was shewn in Roman triumph, and thou shalt
Be drawn with Horses white as Venus doves,
Till heaven it selfe in envy of our bliss,
Snatch thee from earth to place thee in his Orbe,
The brightest constellation. (p. 19)

This beautifully exuberant yet disquieting outburst flows from blank verse into prose with frequent enjambments. 'Thus every minute I will marry thee', aiming to stress everlastingness, achieves the exact opposite in its finicky exactitude. *As You Like It*

³¹ Shirley, *Via ad Latinam Linguam Compladata*, pp. 100–01.

³² Shirley, *The Polititian*, p. 11.

celebrates the fact that ‘there’s no clock in the forest’.³³ Not so in Shirley’s tragedies, where one often senses the clock ticking, whether it is the three minutes Amideia has left to live, or the way in which a Cardinal winds up his creatures like clockwork (of which later). In *The Politician*, the impression that time is up is sustained by the King’s comparison of Marpisa to a masquing queen — a role that is by definition circumscribed and temporary. In its exquisiteness, the passage also sounds like a parody of the superlative lyrics which customarily addressed Charles I and Henrietta Maria in court masques.³⁴ The King’s ravings are immediately met with a one-line put-down, as so often in Shirley when a speaker has been too effusive: Cortes, an ‘honest’ courtier according to the character list, quips: ‘He dotes strangely.’ This discomfort with courtly splendour is also palpable in Shirley’s last tragedy.

The Cardinal feels as if the Duchess of Malfi had been transported to Elsinore in a Spanish Tragedy: a highly articulate female heroine vows to strike back and feigns madness to survive and succeed.³⁵ *The Duchess of Malfi* was republished in 1640, which may have given Shirley an impulse to reconsider Webster for a Caroline audience. *The Cardinal* is a veritable winter’s snake of a play which voices the cadences of late Shakespearean verse in a Websterian setting. Kyd provides the *cantus firmus* in the

³³ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. by S. Wells and G. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 3.2.294–95.

³⁴ Typically, Thomas Heywood’s ‘Upon His Majesties Last Birth-Night’ (pb. in *Pleasant Dialogues and Drammas*, 1637) praised Charles and Henrietta Maria as ‘the brightest constellation’ and the Queen as a pregnant Cynthia; the royal couple were lauded as a perfect constellation in Thomas Carew’s *Coelum Britannicum* (1634).

³⁵ The influence of Webster and Shakespeare has been recognised since the days of Gifford and Dyce; for a detailed study, see in particular Robert S. Forsythe, *The Relations of Shirley’s Plays to the Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914; reissued 1965).

beautiful polyphony of influence; to his credit, Shirley always remains in charge, expertly conducting the ensemble. A passage of particular significance for Shirley derived from *The White Devil* (pb. 1631):

The way ascends not straight, but imitates
The subtle foldings of a winter's snake,
So who knows policy and her true aspect,
Shall find her ways winding and indirect.³⁶

This is Shirley's prologue in 1652, teasing the audience to infer what they like:

A poet's art is to lead on your thought
Through subtle paths and workings of a plot, [...]
I will say nothing positive, you may
Think what you please, we call it but a play;³⁷

The readers are invited to read Shirley's play as a political commentary (critics have speculated about possible allusions to the much disliked Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud³⁸) but the prologue also invites its listeners (and later readers) to a literary game, promising the satisfaction of recognition and pleasing frisson where the path diverts from its expected course.

³⁶ Flamineo, in John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. by John Russell Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 1.2.351–54.

³⁷ Prologue, *The Cardinal*, ed. by Yearling, ll. 7–12.

³⁸ For persuasive political interpretations along these lines see Yearling's edition as well as *The Cardinal*, ed. by Charles Forker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

Duchess Rosaura is a young virgin widow (Shirley had exploited that Caroline male fantasy before in *The Lady of Pleasure*). Promised that, after her first marriage, she would be able to choose her next husband, she finds her hopes disappointed. The powerful Cardinal schemes to marry her off to his nephew Columbo. (The King remains in the shadow for most of the play.) Yet Rosaura has other plans, inclining to the handsome, polished Count Alvarez, and indeed she gets her way — briefly. Interestingly, both suitors have commendable qualities: the ladies of the court admire Columbo as brave and proper. Columbo is the gruff soldier type normally treated well in Shirleian drama (*The Ball* and *Honorio and Mammon* reward military men). Yet as with Sciarra before him, Columbo exhibits an irascible, implacable sense of honour. The exact antitype to Hamlet, he is pointedly ready to ‘kill the next at th’altar’ (4.2.69). Columbo stabs the bridegroom Alvarez at his wedding; the Cardinal becomes the Duchess’s not so tender guardian.

Under pressure, Shirley’s Duchess will deceive, pretending polite concern when Columbo takes leave from her because he has been sent to battle by the King. But why does she weep?

Columbo. We must not use the Priest, till I bring home

Another triumph, that now staies for me

To reap it in the purple field of glory.

Duchess. But do you mean to leave me, and expose

Your self to the devouring war? no enemy

Should Divide us; the King is not so cruell.

Columbo. The King is honourable, and this grace

More answers my ambition, than his gift

Of thee, and all thy beauty, which I can

Love, as becomes thy Souldier, and fight

She weeps

To come agen, a conqueror of thee;

Then I must chide this fondnesse.³⁹

Some readers have been disturbed by so much emotional agility. Georges Bas feels that her feigned expression of grief goes too far.⁴⁰ Too wily to become a lady? A copy of the 1652 edition at Harvard illuminates some telling performance decisions. It was used as prompt-book for a private representation, probably sometime in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century. The Duchess's tears were wiped off the page:

Love, as becomes thy Souldier, and fight ~~She weeps~~

To come agen, a conqueror of thee;

~~Then I must chide this fondnesse.~~⁴¹

It is tempting to think of amateur theatricals as they would have taken place in *Mansfield Park*, with Fanny Price diligently expunging improper lines.

³⁹ James Shirley, *The Cardinal* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1652[53]), p. 7.

⁴⁰ Georges Bas, *James Shirley (1596–1666): Dramaturge caroléen* (Lille: Service de reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III, 1973), p. 254.

⁴¹ Houghton Library, shelfmark 14433.30.22, shows annotations and deletions. Characters have been numbered, lines crossed out in ink. The more salacious lines alluding to the Cardinal's intended rape of the Duchess in Act V were also excised. The hand is difficult to date; Forker considers it a 'neat nineteenth-century hand' (p. lx) but it could also be late eighteenth-century. The title-page bears the name 'John Kearney', date uncertain (18th–19th century?). The copy was a gift of the Bostonian Ernest Blaney Dane (class of 1892).

Why does Rosaura weep? Shirley shows us what characters are capable of when pushed into a corner. Rosaura is not alone but attended by two ladies, one of whom will later betray her. She is acting the expected role of grieving fiancée, and, when alone, admits to ‘deception’ out of necessity. Previous editors have noted her language of obligation and debt that precedes Columbo’s farewell.⁴² Columbo’s approach to his future wife is strategic; she is a gift, an object to be conquered. Rosaura may well be weeping with relief that he is off to the wars.

Characters in Crisis: Shirley versus Chapman

Shirley’s approach to tragedy emerges particularly well in comparison with Chapman’s drama. The older playwright was, like Shirley, a member of the Inns of Court, producing masques for the Inns. Sometime around 1635 Shirley turned to Chapman’s tragedy *Chabot, Admiral of France* (c. 1611), and revised it for a Caroline audience. This is intriguing, for temperamentally Shirley and Chapman are quite different writers. It is instructive to compare how Chapman and Shirley handle a specific type of tragic moment: a crisis scene featuring an articulate female character who stands her ground with a good number of lines. Such scenes crop up intermittently in Chapman’s tragedy: *Bussy d’Ambois* (c. 1604), *The Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois* (1609–10), and *Chabot*; tellingly, they can be found in all of Shirley’s tragedies.

Bussy d’Ambois is a revenge tragedy on the fortunes and fall of the French King’s favourite Bussy. In the course of the play, Bussy has an affair with Tamyra, the Countess

⁴² See *The Cardinal*, ed. by Yearling (1986) and Forker (1964), both commenting on the Duchess’s language of debt and allusions to debtor’s prison in 1.2.100–104.

of Montsurry. In Act V of the play, the Count confronts his adulterous wife and presses her to reveal the name of her lover. The long, graphic scene expresses conjugal agony over 200 lines. I cite it at some length here to show Chapman's technique and the psychology of his characters; only in its unfolding can we appreciate its special rhetorical flavour. The husband enters in a dishevelled state, '*pulling Tamyra in by the hair*'; a friar tries to plead with him. Montsurry curtly dispatches the man, locks the room, and then turns to business:

Montsurry. Who shall remove the mountain from my heart,
Ope the seventimes-heat furnace of my thoughts,
And set fit outcries for a soul in hell?
O now it nothing fits my cares to speak,
But thunder, or to take into my throat
The trump of Heaven; with whose determinate blasts
The winds shall burst, and the enraged seas
Be drunk up in his sounds; that my hot woes
(Vented enough) I might convert to vapour,
Ascending from my infamy unseen;
Shorten the world, preventing the last breath
That kills the living, and regenerates death.

Tamyra. My Lord, my fault (as you may censure it
With too strong arguments) is past your pardon:
But how the circumstances may excuse me
God knows, and your more temperate mind hereafter
May let my penitent miseries make you know.

Montsurry. Hereafter? 'Tis a suppos'd infinite,
That from this point will rise eternally:

Fame grows in going; in the 'scapes of virtue
 Excuses damn her: they be fires in cities
 Enrag'd with those winds that less lights extinguish.
 Come Siren, sing, and dash against my rocks
 Thy ruffi'n Galley, laden for thy lust: [i.e. Bussy]
 Sing, and put all the nets into thy voice,
 With which thou drew'st into thy strumpet's lap
 The spawn of Venus; and in which ye danc'd;
 That in thy lap's stead, I may dig his tomb,
 And quit his manhood with a woman's sleight,
 Who never is deceiv'd in her deceit.
 Sing (that is, write), and then take from mine eyes
 The mists that hide the most inscrutable Pandar
 That ever lapp'd up an adulterous vomit:
 That I may see the devil, and survive
 To be a devil, and then learn to wive:
 That I may hang him, and then cut him down,
 Then cut him up, and with my soul's beams search
 The cranks and caverns of his brain, and study
 The errant wilderness of a woman's face;⁴³

As Chapman's editor Nicholas Brooke has observed, 'Chapman seldom underloads his work'.⁴⁴ This quality is certainly in evidence here. Chapman is not interested in realism. His tragedy gestures toward baroque opera, where star singers step outside the action

⁴³ George Chapman, *Bussy d'Ambois*, ed. by Nicholas Brooke (London: Methuen, 1964), 5.1.38–76; emphases mine.

⁴⁴ Chapman, *Bussy d'Ambois*, p. xix.

and venture front-stage to blast their aria at a swooning audience. In *Bussy* 5.1, each actor delivers a bravura rant whose powerful imagery stands for itself. The speakers' greatest challenge lies in the masterful handling of complex syntax and dense conceits while keeping abreast of the rhythm, and it is hard to disagree with critics that Chapman's drama 'would make severe demands on modern actors'.⁴⁵

In Chapman's time, theatre historians estimate that actors delivered their speeches at the rate of 18–21 lines per minute.⁴⁶ Shirley's tragedies roughly vary between 2,000 and 2,400 lines; *Bussy* is over 2,400 lines long.⁴⁷ This raises the interesting question of whether playwrights deliberately wrote in some extra dialogue to give companies a little more flexibility, offering a variety of situations for adoption or cutting, but we cannot establish with certainty that this happened in Chapman's tragedy. If *Bussy* was not cut and the performance lasted for two and a half hours, Montsurry would have had less than five seconds to capture that 'infinite, / That from this point will rise eternally'. An actor has to compress and at the same time release from Montsurry's hot furnace of thoughts the angry energy which encompasses all four elements. 'Montsurry' needs to

⁴⁵ Nicholas Brooke, in *Bussy*, p. liii.

⁴⁶ Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare & Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 118–19. Estimate based on the average Elizabethan play running to about 2500 lines, and on frequent references to 'two hours' traffic' onstage; extending possible play-length to 2.5 hours, Schmidgall arrives at 18 lines/minute.

⁴⁷ Estimate (counting full lines): *The Maid's Revenge*: ; *The Traitor*: 2300+; *The Politician*: 2000+; *The Cardinal*: 2000+; The Bute prompt book of *Love's Cruelty* (2,000+ lines) was cut by some 190–250 full lines (due to severe cropping it is not always clear whether lines were supposed to be cut or marked up otherwise). At 1,800 lines, *Love's Cruelty* might have been more comfortable with actors and listeners. Compare this to Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois* and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (both 2400+).

move on to Tamyra, the ‘Siren’; imagine her adultery like a galley hitting the rock of their marriage; then imagine himself like a pandering dog that has lapped up the stale food of her affections, already savoured by someone else; then imagine killing his rival, carving him up, and finding in the dead anatomy the deceitful smile of his wife. This *tour de force* casts into stark relief not only the virtuosity of an early modern tragic actor but also the listening capacities of his audience.

How does Chapman have Tamyra counter her husband’s outburst? Montsurry goes to extremes to make Tamyra confess her lover’s name. He stabs her repeatedly; and yet Tamyra refuses to write a letter which would lure her lover into a trap that Montsurry has set up. Among Chapman’s (few) tragic heroines, she is unusually vocal, holding her own for a long time, despite Montsurry’s haranguing:

Tamyra. O good my Lord forbear
In wreak of great sins, to engender greater,
And make my love’s corruption generate murder.

Montsurry. It follows needfully as child and parent;
The chain-shot of thy lust is yet aloft,
And it must murder; ’tis thine own dear twin:
No man can add height to a woman’s sin.
[...]
Speak: will you write?

Tamyra. Sweet Lord enjoin my sin
Some other penance than what makes it worse:
Hide in some gloomy dungeon my loath’d face,
And let condemned murderers let me down
(Stopping their noses) my abhorred food.
Hang me in chains, and let me eat these arms

That have offended: [...]

Montsurry. [...] thine arms have lost

Their privilege in lust, and in their torture

Thus they must pay it.

Stabs her.

Tamyra. O Lord.

Montsurry. Till thou writ'st

I'll write in wounds (my wrongs' fit characters)

Thy right of sufferance. Write.

Tamyra. O kill me, kill me:

Dear husband be not crueller than death;

You have beheld some Gorgon: feel, O feel

How you are turn'd to stone; with my heart blood

Dissolve yourself again, or you will grow

Into the image of all Tyranny.

Montsurry. As thou art of Adultery, I will still

Prove thee my like in ill, being most a monster:

Thus I express thee yet.

Stabs her again.

Tamyra. And yet I live. (5.1.87–134)

At this point servants enter and place Tamyra on the rack; things come to a head, and the wife eventually capitulates.

In performance, what does a character do while his or her interlocutor goes on for thirty-odd lines? What the play gains in rhetorical power, it loses in interrelation. In truth, Chapman here conveys no dialogue but a sequence of monologues. His characters pick up cues from each other ('hereafter' — 'hereafter?'; 'generate murder' — 'child and parent'; 'Tyranny' — 'Adultery'), but they do not really talk to each other. This is not an exchange of kindred souls. Each protagonist persists in their groove, Montsurry's

bellowing ‘write!’ being repeatedly rebutted by Tamyra’s equally strident refusal to do so. The effect of their interaction is almost panto-like: you will! — no, I won’t! — yes, you will! In the words of *Bussy*’s editor, ‘the flexibility of Chapman’s thought and language is often apt to disappear in an inflexibility of rhetorical rhythm — a mannerism which is yet in itself essential to the play’s peculiar unity of tone’ (p. xxvii). Such inflexibility need not be to the play’s disadvantage; after all, the characters make no progress in their relationship. Even in the sequel, Tamyra and Montsurry are still deeply unhappy with each other; with iron consistency, Tamyra looks forward to killing her spouse. All this is persuasively underscored by Chapman’s rhetoric. But it will make the performance more difficult for modern actors.

In 2012, the Shirley Project organised recitals from plays by Shirley and other writers of the period, including Chapman. Speakers included graduate students, as well as Durham University’s Orator, and two professional actors experienced in Renaissance repertoire, Guy Henry and Sonia Ritter.⁴⁸ The actors’ reaction to Chapman’s verse was telling. Henry, who studied Montsurry’s part, found Chapman’s stress patterns difficult and tiring, even though he worked from a modernised edition. Ritter had prepared Tamyra by reading both a modernised text and the first quarto, and yet considered her speeches a significant challenge. Ritter looked for key words to anchor the flow of Tamyra’s argument in her own and the audience’s mind; these key terms are underlined in the above passages. ‘Sin’ — the adultery with Bussy — was one such word. Ritter connected instances of ‘sin’ across her speech, building a bridge, as it were, to help her listeners cross the deep waters of Chapman’s rhetoric. With Chapman, she found that

⁴⁸ I would like to express my thanks to Alastair Brown, David Fuller, Eva Griffith, Guy Henry, Sonia Ritter, Jo Shirley, Philip Sidney, and Dan Starza Smith. Recordings are available at the project website, at <http://community.dur.ac.uk/james.shirley/>.

the arcs of the bridge were enormous: 'him' — the lover Montsurry wished to hang up, cut down, and carve up — was the 'sin' of some ten lines later. For the untrained listener's ear, 'sin' did not follow naturally upon 'him' as child would upon parent.

How does Shirley tackle the high thrill of crisis? His tragedy does occasionally present longer blocks of monologue; yet when they occur, various techniques ease the flow. A prime example derives from *The Cardinal*, where a spirited Duchess berates the Cardinal for his scarlet ambition:

Duchess. Begin at home, great man, there's cause enough.

You turn the wrong end of the perspective
Upon your crimes, to drive them to a far
And lesser sight — but let your eyes look right,
What giants would your pride and surfeit seem!
How gross your avarice, eating up whole families!
How vast are your corruptions and abuse
Of the King's ear! at which you hang, a pendant,
Not to adorn but ulcerate, while the honest
Nobility, like pictures in the arras,
Serve only for court-ornament. If they speak,
'Tis when you set their tongues, which you wind up
Like clocks to strike at the just hour you please.
Leave, leave, my Lord, these usurpations,
And be what you were meant, a man to cure,
Not let in agues to religion;
Look on the church's wounds.

Cardinal.

You dare presume

In your rude spleen to me, to abuse the church?

Duchess. Alas, you give false aim, my Lord. 'Tis your
 Ambition and scarlet sins that rob
 Her altar of the glory, and leave wounds
 Upon her brow; which fetches grief and paleness
 Into her cheeks; making her troubled bosom
 Pant with her groans, and shroud her holy blushes
 Within your reverend purples.

Cardinal. Will you now take breath?⁴⁹

Chapman likes the Chinese box, where the rhetoric unveils layers of meanings. Shirley's rhetorical strategy is more immediate. While Montsurry circles in on his own sentiments, the Duchess keeps the focus on her opponent throughout, whom she addresses repeatedly and directly, with imperatives ('look', 'leave'). Shirley's 'sins' point clearly at the Cardinal, and the nature of the Cardinal's crimes is clear; we do not have to look for clues across ten or more lines. Shirley's rhythm is more flexible, with fewer end-stopped lines, and the lines in themselves exhibit uneven length, mirroring the Duchess's agitation. Shirley's logic is concrete and consecutive: begin at home > there you will see how your avarice ruins families. This is textbook mnemonics. One senses the grammarian and experienced preacher and teacher. Shirley knows how to break down a lesson to his audience in a way that they can best remember it.

Montsurry is mentally and rhetorically at sea, powerfully expressing his rage in a feat of pulmonary athletics. He could be delivering his speech anywhere. *The Cardinal* feels more closeted and anchored. Rosaura's speech is taxing too; but Shirley tells us that it is. The Cardinal's dry riposte to her tirade is, in one sense, a metadramatic comment on the performance's demands that can render a speaker breathless. In another sense, when

⁴⁹ *The Cardinal*, ed. by Yearling, 2.3.139–63.

Rosaura imagines the church's troubled bosom panting, one wonders whether she might talk about herself; the following, equally sensual lines 'shroud her holy blushes / Within your reverend purples' might give an early clue as to why the Cardinal might feel turned on by her in Act V.

Unlike Chapman's, Shirley's verbal scenery conveys the sensation of characters positioned in a stately room; there are allusions to 'court ornament', clocks, pictures, and an arras, lines drenched in the triumphant scarlet colours of the church. Among the playwrights of his time, Shirley was exceptionally partial to hangings and curtains; such devices intimate rich interiors but also enclosed spaces; they are surfaces hiding something, or someone, beneath.⁵⁰ Hamlet famously smells a rat behind the hangings — a line cited again by the manic Depazzi in *The Traitor*, a play where hangings do serve to conceal assassins.⁵¹

Shirley wrote for small private theatres. The recently opened Sam Wanamaker Playhouse with its candlelit space allows for a fresh consideration of Shirleian tragedy in performance.⁵² Some of *The Cardinal's* editors clear the space for the crucial stand-off between Duchess Rosaura and the Cardinal because they feel that this scene requires intimacy.⁵³ The implicit thinking appears to be that the Duchess cannot possibly

⁵⁰ David Stevens claims Shirley to be 'the Renaissance dramatist most aware of the dramatic possibilities of stage hangings' with 14 of his 24 plays for Beeston's companies referring to the device. 'The Stagecraft of James Shirley', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 29.4 (1977), 493–516 (p. 499).

⁵¹ *The Traitor*, ed. by Carter, 3.1.27.

⁵² The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse is the subject of *Moving Shakespeare Indoors: Performance and Repertoire in the Jacobean Playhouse*, ed. by Andrew Gurr and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵³ Yearling inserts a collective exit after 2.3.70; Forker has the King exit after 2.3.59 but leaves the question of Hernando and the 'lords' open.

confront the Cardinal in the presence of others. But in the 1652 octavo Alvarez and the King are the only characters that definitely leave the scene.⁵⁴ What if some lords are still around? As the Wanamaker Playhouse shows, the lowering of chandeliers, and the changed effect of lighting this brings about, can intimate a smaller space and blend out other characters that might still be onstage. If the Duchess refers to the Cardinal as an ulcerous pendant in the King's ear who relegates the silent court to a mere backdrop this could have been emphasised by lighting that privileged the Cardinal and cast the remaining courtiers into shadow. Shirley's vivid lines suggest a space adorned with an arras, and some other decorative item such as a clock or a painting. Such props could have served as a prompting device and mnemonic aid: the Cardinal winds up his courtiers like a clock; they are his instruments — and the stage shows it to be so.

With Shirley and Chapman each expressing such distinctive voices, one wonders what a hybrid Shirley-Chapman text might look like. In the later 1630s Shirley busied himself with Chapman's *Chabot*. The Master of the Revels licensed the play as Shirley's on 29 April 1635.⁵⁵ As *Chabot* was only published once, in quarto in 1639, it is not possible to compare the revised version to its Jacobean original which may have been composed around 1611; even so, studies have identified a number of mannerisms which bear strong evidence of Shirley's hand.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *The Cardinal*, sig. C3: '[Exit King, who meets the Cardinal, they confer.]'; Alvarez exits on C3v; manent lords, Hernando, and a gentleman usher, whose exits are not specified.

⁵⁵ N. W. Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 193.

⁵⁶ 'George Chapman' and 'James Shirly', *The Tragedie of Chabot Admirall of France* (London: Thomas Cotes for Andrew Crooke and William Cooke, 4^o 1639). This revised *Chabot* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 24 October 1638, together with Shirley's *The Ball*. Gifford and Dyce considered Shirley's contribution substantial enough to include *Chabot* in their 1833 edition of

My present condition worth your triumph,

[...]

Fa. Madam you are the Queene, she is my daughter,

And he that you have character'd so monstrous,

My sonne in Law, now gon to be arraign'd;

The King is just, and a good man, but't does not

Adde to the graces of your royall person

To tread upon a Lady thus dejected

By her owne griefe; her Lord's not yet found guilty,

Much lesse condemn'd, though you have pleas'd to execute him.

Qu. What sawcy fellow's this?

Fa. I must confesse

I am a man out of this element,

No Courtier, yet I am a gentleman

That dare speake honest truth to the Queenes eare,

(A duty every subject wonot pay you)[.]⁵⁸

The ensuing dynamics of the dialogue attest to slight changes in direction; the tone becomes more conciliatory. The wife defers to the Queen, who shows herself appeased:

Wif. I ha done. If the devotion to my Lord,

Or pietie to his innocence have led me

Beyond the awfull limits to be observ'd

By one so much beneath your sacred person,

I thus low crave your royal pardon Madam;

⁵⁸ George Chapman, *The Tragedie of Chabot Admirall of France*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans, in *The Plays of George Chapman*, 3.1.58–101.

[...]

Qu.

This declares

Another soule than was deliver'd me,

My anger melts, and I beginne to pittie her.⁵⁹

The Queen demonstrates an ability to moderate her point of view. Shirley almost certainly inserted the scene into Chapman's tragedy. *Chabot* 3.1. is strikingly different from *Bussy* 5.1.

Chapman's characters in general do not change their mind; his drama extols stoicism, a marble constancy of purpose (Tamyra and Charlotte in the *Bussy* plays; Cornelia in *Caesar and Pompey*), and unwavering loyalty even when misguided (Clermont kills himself after Guise's fall; one wonders what a Jacobean audience might have thought about his decision to follow into death the fanatic Catholic who orchestrated the St Bartholomew's Day massacre). 'It is an obvious characteristic of tragedy', Paul Hammond writes, 'that its protagonist is not granted time to change, to repent, to restore. By contrast, the genre of comedy, however occasionally cruel, seems to be ultimately forgiving in allowing time for the characters to change.'⁶⁰ One wonders. It does not even occur to Chapman's Jacobean protagonists that they might need time — what for? But Shirley's are characters that *want* to change their mind. Sciarra fears and hopes he might relent; characters are responsive to each other. The tragic consciousness espying the comic alternative on the unreachable horizon might be worse off than the character going down in a lonely impulse of delight.

⁵⁹ Chapman, *Chabot*, 3.1.166–203.

⁶⁰ Paul Hammond, *The Strangeness of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 7.

Conclusion

When Marlowe's Mephistopheles says, 'where we are is hell', Faustus retorts (rather unreasonably, given he is speaking to a devil), 'Come, I think hell's a fable'.⁶¹ A Shirleian character might have responded with a polite invitation: 'you may find yourself at home with the Cardinal and his ward Rosaura; would you care to attend a banquet with a masque?' This is not quite the tone to mollify a broad critical phalanx which harks back to ancient Greece for the supreme tragic spirit, which rewards muscular defiance, and which draws satisfaction from 'pain mingled with exultation'.⁶² Of course Caroline tragedy differs from the *Oresteia* but that hardly means the death of the genre. 'Pain reflected' rather than 'exultation' is the superbly articulated concern of Shirleian tragedy. Shirley is quietly assertive rather than glaringly provocative; elegant understatement is his style. His characters require neither gods nor devils to engineer their tragedy; the human mind is perfectly capable of inhumanity. Here Shirley presents in smaller scale what other Caroline tragedians paint on a more ample canvas — Philip Massinger's Roman play *Believe as You List* (1631) shows us a king brought down not by fate but an administrator in an imperial outpost. Such plays are clear-sighted forms of human tragedy; they do not flaunt any obvious radical agenda. As long as theorists of tragedy demand that a writer must take the hammer to the canon to deserve critical accolade, Shirley — and with him, many other Caroline tragedians — will not obtain the acknowledgement due to their artistic achievement.

⁶¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. by D. Bevington and E. Rasmussen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 2.1.125, 130 (A-text 1604).

⁶² George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), ch. 2. I economise on A. C. Bradley's 'pain is mingled [...] with something like exultation' (on Lear, Hamlet, and Othello), in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 84.

Shirley learned about perspective when he collaborated with Inigo Jones in *The Triumph of Peace*, witnessing the high end of illusionistic theatre of the day. In Shirley's understanding, it became not just a way of seeing but of thinking. In that sense, Shirley's tragedy seems sometimes adult and knowing, even calculating, and it makes sense that many critics have felt that Shirley's characters 'do their thinking behind the scenes'.⁶³ But perspective equally means an ability to change points of view, which Shirley's characters audibly demonstrate. Shirley's tragedies may give us hangings that are visual as much as verbal. These are fitting scenes for the polished fandango of characters who know what is at stake, who choose their words wisely, with just a little venom seeping through to make the conversation anything but bland. Shirley will offer his protagonists the rich trappings of tragic grandeur, fuss around them, and make them feel important, but he will eventually bring down his masquing stars.

Terry Eagleton has declared tragedy an 'unfashionable subject' in contemporary literary culture because

it smacks of virile warriors and immolated virgins, cosmic fatality and stoical acquiescence. [...] As an aristocrat among art forms, its tone is too solemn and portentous for a streetwise, sceptical culture.⁶⁴

Long before any postmodern readership, Caroline dramatists had already reflected on such concerns. Shirley does immolate his virgins but at least they are allowed to say what they think about their sacrifice, and they tend to make the tragic heroes around them look stupid. Shirley wrote for a streetwise, sceptical society which ultimately sent, in

⁶³ Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587–1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 229.

⁶⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. ix.

Marvell's famous words, its very own 'royal actor' out onto the 'tragic scaffold'.⁶⁵ The aristocratic art form was put to the test by a playwright who loved characters and conventions of classical and Elizabethan tragedy and yet kept both at arm's length.

⁶⁵ Andrew Marvell, 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland', in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by N. Smith (London: Pearson, 2003), p. 276, ll. 53–54.